BULLETIN of the AMERICAN INDEPENDENT MOVEMENT. VOL.4 no.1, Jan 1, 1969 20 cents

AIM

THE LEFT IN WEST GERMANY

by Conrad Schuhler

Conrad Schuhler is a German sociologist. This year he is a post-doctoral Fellow at Yale. He expresses his own views here.

The present political scene of West Germany is marked by three fundamental developments: (1) the working cooperation of the two major parties (Christian Democrats and Social Democrats) based on a conservative pragmatic platform and program, expressed in the existence and the politics of the so-called "Great Coalition"; (2) the growing strength of the neonazistic National Democratic Party which is expected to get 12-15% of the vote in the next general election in 1969; (3) the formation of a left "Extraparliamentary Opposition" which is also going to participate in the next election. One might add a fourth important development. The new political posture of the liberal agencies of mass communication. Whereas the liberal journalists used formerly to engage in personalistic and pointistic criticism of the conservative–capitalistic system, they now concentrate their fire above all upon the Left in West Germany itself as well as in the international arena. The conservative press, dominated by Axel Springer, supports more and more—or at least "tolerates actively"— the nationalistic and reactionary forces.

None of these developments is accidental nor minor in significance. Each is an expression of the general stage of the West German political and economic development. By joining the govermment as junior partners of the Christian Democrats, the Social Democrats only made obvious the fact that the Parliament has lost its supposed function as an organ for overseeing the actions of the executive body. With that move they confirmed the fact that the center of power in a developed capitalistic society is to be found in the complex of the bureaucratic heads of the administration, big political parties, big labor and big capital. None of them is democratically organized, and as a power unit they meet with no effective countervailing powers.

This situation—the bureaucratically centralized power—is one of the causes of the growing popularity of neofascistic ideologies and organizations. People are aware that somewhere decisions are made which define the conditions of their lives almost totally, and they realize that they have no chances at all to influence these decisions. They are learning from direct experience that these decisions create serious dangers for them. Some of the changes which threaten the people result from the logic of industrial development. The decreasing importance of the agricultural sector, the automation of industrial production, the permanent readjustment of occupational skills in accordance to new technological methods, the obsolescence of traditional branches of production, and the formation of new ones—all these developments are inevitable within an industrial society. But the fact that people are not prepared for these changes and that they are only objects, not participating agents of this historical development—that is *not* a part of the logic of industrial systems but the consequence of the capitalistic organization of industrial systems.

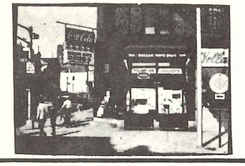
This mode of social organization accelerates the narrowing conditions under which people live, not only on the economic level but also on the social and individual and psychological levels. People are frightened of losing their jobs or at least their relative economic position. They realize by experience that they cannot meet the new conditions forced on them. In contradiction to the *collective* quality of industrial production, they become more and more socially *isolated* and fear a further decrease of their social standing. Recognizing themselves as objects in the hands of the powerful, doing work meaningless to them, organized by the mass media during their "leisure time", they see no chance to develop their personality, to win "identity". If we consider additionally the low level of mass-education in West Germany and the heavy anti-communist propaganda during tha last twenty years, nobody should be surprised if social groups which fear to be rolled over by the capitalistic-industrial development feel attracted by a simplistic ideology offering populist and nationalistic solutions. The Neo-Nazi movement is the irrational response to an irrational situation. And the more irrational the social situation becomes, the more irrational these responses will be, and the more people will find the response adequate. But that is only one side of the problem. The lack of preparations of the society to face the inevitable future problems of the West German capitalistic system is going to hurt the interests of the conservative power-class too. And it would not be for the first time in German history that the capitalistic class becomes the ally of the fascist movement as the supposed last chance to solve the expanding built-in problems of the capitalistic system.

The growing strength of the West German left movement is to be understood within this context. Our short remarks on some tendencies in the West German society indicated a certain stage of the development of a capitalistic society which we can call State-Monopoly Capitalism. This stage is reached when the domestic economic interdependence and the international interests of national economies are so far advanced that the management of these affairs demands a nationally centralized agency. Thus the centralization and bureaucratization of power in developed capitalistic societies is not an "historical accident" or a mistake which could be corrected within the given patterns of dominant interests. The state as the central decision-maker and its subordination to the interests of the capitalistic industry are functional requisites of a developed capitalistic system. The maintenance of this relationship so essential to the system demands two preconditions: There must be an ideology which denies the existence of conflicting or even antagonistic interests and, secondly, there must be legal provisions to guarantee the overwhelming power of the state in situations where the antagonistic reality has erupted in political confrontations which threaten the system despite the ideology of common interests.

NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTS: 1968

January

THE RING ROAD IS COMING



February

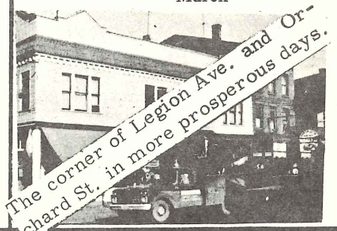
b.

Distribution by Ethnic Group Within Total Poverty Population

W	37.7%
N	58.6%
PR	3.7%

CPI: ANATOMY OF A FAILURE

March



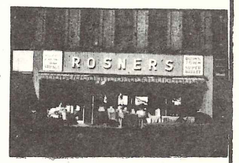
ROUTE 34

April

A PROGRAM FOR '68

May

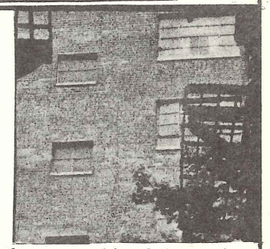
STATE ST. –



WHAT HAPPENED WHAT NEXT

June

ELM HAVEN



High rise on the wrong side of the tracks

July

YALE EMPLOYEE'S STRIKE: THE SETTLEMENT

VIETNAM CLOSE-UP

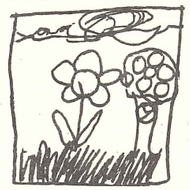
August

"Police are second-class citizens."

THE McCARTHY CAMPAIGN IN CONNECTICUT

September

THE



CHILDREN'S SCHOOL

WE WILL CAMPAIGN

October

NEW HAVEN AIR POLLUTERS:

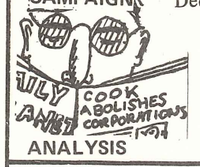
1. CARS
2. INDUSTRY
3. UNITED ILLUMINATING
4. YALE

November

vote for bob cook ... work with AIM

December

CAMPAIGN



ANALYSIS

MILL RIVER

GUILTY!... OF REFUSING TO GO TO WAR

Happy New Year!

RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTION NOW!

Even if your subscription is not due for renewal until later in the new year, please re-subscribe now. The Newsletter is desperate for funds.

Remember:
Regular Subscription.....$5
Sponsoring Subscription.....$10

Name _____

Address _____

Mail with your check to:
AIM Newsletter, 241 Orange Street, New Haven, Conn. 06510

The AIM Newsletter has now been in existence for more than two years. We hope you have noticed some recent improvements. The Newsletter used to come out rather erratically at intervals of three weeks or longer and it averaged a maximum of ten pages with very few pictures and rather rough typing. We are now coming out on a regular bi-weekly basis, averaging sixteen pages an issue, and we have greatly expanded our graphics. Also, our text is now typed on an IBM Selectric-Composer, a complex piece of equipment that requires skills beyond those of the average typist.

When the Newsletter began, we hit upon the figure of $2.00 for a regular subscription, and $5.00 for a sponsoring subscription. Thanks largely to scattered generous gifts, we have managed to keep barely solvent on that basis. But our recent expansion and improvements in the quality of our production have forced us to do some hard figuring. We have discovered that on a 25 issue per year basis, the printing costs alone for each subscription come to $4.30, while the mailing costs alone come to $1.75. This total cost of $6.05 per subscription per year excludes an average of 175 man hours per week of volunteer labor. We have thus discovered that at our present rate even sponsoring subscriptions are being subsidized by AIM.

We are very anxious to keep the readers we now have, and to expand our subscribers, but we feel compelled to risk increasing our rates in order to maintain a bigger and better Newsletter. We therefore regretfully announce our new subscription rates for 1969, and ask you to re-subscribe now.

The German ruling classes tried to establish both preconditions. The former chancellor, Ludwig Ehrhard, invented the ideology of the "corporate society." In this ideology the society was seen as a nation-wide company in which all men have to work for one common goal, the so-called "commonweal." In practice this goal was defined in terms of Gross National Product. This attempt to freeze traditional distributions of power and income was continued by Karl Schiller, the present West German Minister of Ecomomy. He calls his concept "concerted action." In this the existence of different interest-groups is not completely denied, but all actions and reactions of the various groups have to be "complementary" and "functional" vis-à-vis two main goals: growth and stability of the economy. Again, the abstract primacy of the "economy as a whole" and again the complete disregard of the actual needs of the people who have to work under very different conditions and get very different rewards. But without any doubt Mr. Schiller has been pretty successful with his ideological concoctions, and even the unions seem now somehow proud to act and to be accepted as "responsible citizens." The empirical consequence is that the profits are rapidly growing in absolute terms as well as in relation to the wages.

In addition to these ideological campaigns and new "collective bargaining" methods, the established powers of West Germany also have performed the second functional task. So-called "Emergency-laws" have been formulated and were enacted by the Parliament in May 1968. These laws were prepared originally by the political agencies of big industry and were then refined by civil servants—some of whom have been specialized in this sort of task since the days of Great Germany. The main function of the laws was clear to everybody: to provide the state with formally legal measures against possible opposition groups, especially workers and students. These new laws make it possible to use the Army against "organized and armed" dissident groups and to declare the people's labor as an "official duty," which means that the workers are forced to act economically and politically within the pattern of the mythic "commonweal" defined by the state, i.e. the traditional power groups.

It was in the resistance against these laws that the New Left got its new quality of a more united and more clear-headed organization. Workers as well as students and intellectuals realized that now their elementary democratic interests were at stake. But there remains a long way from this realization and the knowledge of the common enemy to the achievement of a common political unit which is ideologically and structurally integrated. The different every-day social practice, the different political development in the past and the different approaches and capacities to analyze the political and social situation made it extremely difficult to bring the groups together.

The history of the German student movement is the history of the SDS, the German Socialist Student organization. Founded after the war as the student-appendix of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), this group had significant experiences with the 'reformist' political forces as well as with the general "political public." The group had fought within party for socialist goals broadly accepted in West Germany in the late forties. They had no chances at all against the conservative bureaucratic heads of the party, and in 1958 the Social Democratic Party declared her "turning away from Marxism" and her "opening to a People's Party." The socialist students continued to argue in terms of radical democracy and were taught a lesson through the due functioning of interior Party democracy. First the financial supports were cut off by the party; then the students were excluded *in toto.*

Without being involved in formal political structures and confrontations the SDS then concentrated upon theoretical analysis of society and especially upon the social system they had to work in, namely the university. From 1961 to 1965 the socialist students developed and published a number of proposals and models to improve the undemocratic and unefficient structure of the German university system—valuable proposals as the 'experts' now are ready to admit. Nobody was listening, nothing happened. After four years of successful theoretical work and persistent intellectual communication with the authorities, there was no political response at all. Consequently the students elaborated a new strategy of communication: the "direct actions." Confrontations with the established authorities would demonstrate to the public, they thought, the irrationality and inhumanity of the system. In this effort, the students paid high costs. Thousands were clubbed, hundreds sentenced to jail, some killed or badly wounded. And—they didn't get their message to the people. "Direct actions," confrontations as "exercises in democracy"—turned out to be an illusion. The reality was that there was only a public audience if the mass media created one, and then it was a prejudiced audience and an even more prejudiced information by the media.

Furthermore, the sophisticated articulation characteristic of the students was hardly understandable to the people. To judge the tremendous efforts of the students in political terms: they have succeeded in provoking the system to show its brutality and hostility vis-a-vis radical democracy. But this brutality and undemocratic behavior took place with the growing support of the people, who did not understand the theory and tactics of the students. The students were the victims of their incorrect strategy; all their suffering—aimed at inspiring democratic resistance against the inhumane politics of the conservative power-groups—was politically worthless because people could not see the political context. The strong group solidarity of the students was paralleled by their deep isolation from other social groups.

The political development of the

left workers was very different. Their original main political representative, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), changed in the fifties from a socialist party to a conservative voting-company without real opposition by the members. On the contrary, the antisocialist move of the Party in 1958 was applauded by the great majority of the members. To leave Marxism meant to become middle-class. They wanted to belong to this society and this state, and they wanted to be accepted as equivalent members. The economic growth and the anti-socialistic propaganda made it unnecessary and dangerous to be different. There was a strongly felt need to get social reputation along the new lines of social prestige. That meant for the workers to seek a new political identity, and the now "un-ideological" SPD offered just that.

But there was also a small minority, especially among the skilled workers, who had a traditional and stable self-consciousness as workers. This group disagreed with the new direction of the Party bureaucracy. They remained in the party as a sort of silent opposition. Having no real influence in the party they increased their activities in the unions and in the companies, forming partly an unofficial alliance with the old communist workers whose party organization had been forbidden in 1956. For the already alienated part of the working class the decisions of the SPD to join the Government and to back the Emergency-Laws were the final proof that this party did not represent the interests of the working class any longer. Consequently the left workers too joined the Extra-parliamentary Opposition realizing that they themselves had to fight directly for their own interests and no longer work through any representatives.

The Extra-parliamentary Opposition collected workers, students, intellectuals, single-purpose-movements (such as the Campaign for Disarmament), and left members of the SPD. There was no formal structure and no common theory. There was however—in the short run—a common goal, equally vital for each group: to prevent the passing of the Emergency-laws in the Parliament. There was also an additional hope; the activities and general experience of a common resistance could lead to a solidarity beyond the special case. This second point was the most important. It was clear that even the dedicated resistance of some hundred thousand democrats could not prevent the passage of the laws. The strategical significance of the entire undertaking lay in the opportunity to create a broader base of radical democrats.

Just that happened. The only political force which could have prevented the laws, namely the unions, protested only verbally and vaguely. The big demonstrations of the left (altogether several hundred thousand demonstrators) served mainly to illustrate "how democratic our system is." The laws were passed in the Parliament. But the initial hope was realized. The movement survived its immediate cause. Most of the problems caused by the heterogeneity of its members survived too. But without any doubt the sense of solidarity has been strengthened and new, valuable criteria have been developed to judge the different strategical propositions and to weigh the revolutionary quality of seemingly left groups.

The conclusions which result from the political experience of the West German left may be summarized under the following headings:

1) Theory and Praxis: The theory has to derive from the intelligent analysis of the praxis. There is no closed theory at the beginning, only guiding principles. The aim is that people learn to articulate their interests, to recognize their enemies, to defend their interests and finally to control their lives themselves. Under the present conditions in West Germany left strategy means the organization of the self-defense of the people against the privileged and by the people who are involved in this struggle.

2)Organization of the movement: The organization has to be absolutely democratic. No bureaucratic authorities, no distinction between active and passive members. The personal organization of their present interests by the people is the necessary training for the final self-government of the people in a real democratic society. A democratic organization has also decisive strategy advantages: there are no leaders who can be corrupted by arrangements with the conservative political groups or be alienated from the people by "media-orientation."

3) The role of the "great personalities." As Brecht put it: "Happy a society which has no heroes; happy a society which doesn't need heroes." If everybody had the possibility and capacity to stand up effectively against injustice there would not be any unjust social system. It needs "heroes" in this sense—men with particular intellectual, psychical and even physical qualities—to move and broaden and coordinate the organization: leaders by knowledge and efforts, not by formal authority.

4)Unity of the movement: Intellectuals and students have to understand themselves as parts of the working-class. This not by the abstract decision that their material and humane interests are threatened by the capitalistic development, but by taking part concretely in the common self-defense of the non-capitalistic classes.

5) Differences within the movement: One must distinguish between the primary and secondary contradictions in a society. The primary contradictions result in the unity of the movement. But the single non-capitalistic social groups are placed in different positions within the capitalistic system and are logically confronted with different problems. Accordingly, they have to develop different measures of self-defense. This demands adequate channels of communication and co-operation within the general movement.

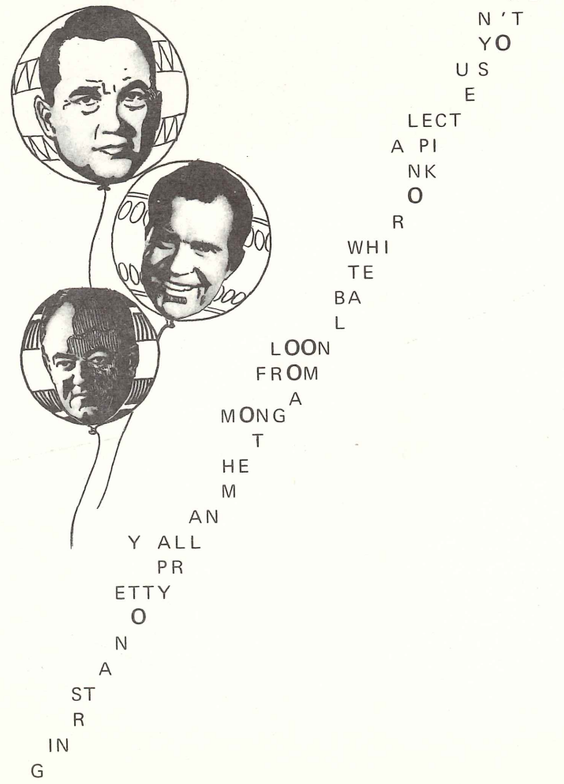
6) Forms of resistance: "Resistance" means that people organize themselves along their interests. To debate "resistance" in terms of violent or non-violent actions is missing the point. The whole concept of "direct actions" as a means of public enlightenment is—within the West German social context—desperately obsolete. It is not our problem to inform a mythic "general public" about the inhumane and irrational qualities of the West German institutional system. Our problem is to develop forms of political organization which people can really and permanently take part in, without having to fear that their entire socio-economic existence will be destroyed on account of this participation.

7) Legality of the movement: Our resistance is directed against objectively undemocratic social institutions and the undemocratic abuse of social institutions. The movement is revolutionary in this sense: to change basically the undemocratic reality of West German society. Such a policy is in accordance with all democratic principles and therefore fundamentally legitimate. It is also legal in the narrow sense of written constitutional law. Actually the West German constitution can be the juridical basis of a non-democratic-capitalistic system as well as of a socialist-democratic system. We have to make it very clear that the German Left movement offers a juridically acceptable alternative to the present undemocratic state of social affairs. This point is especially important in a society in which the conservative power-groups tend to use the courts and the police against leftist organizations and individuals. This use of illegitimate violence by the ruling classes has often to be countered by the left with measures which then are denounced by the liberals as "irresponsible violence." Less prejudiced observers would realize the character of legitimate self-defense of this "counterviolence."

Two political events in the last months and their responses within the West German left have illuminated the remaining interior difficulties of the movement. The military invasion of Czechoslovakia by the five Warsaw-pact states and the foundation of a new German Communist Party have resulted in very different comments and actions on behalf of the various leftists groupings. It was proved that there is a strong marxist group which understood the USSR invasion as an eventually necessary means to guarantee the further socialist development of the society; this group also accepts the communist party as an important part of the general left movement in West Germany. The anti-authoritarian wing—almost entirely intellectuals and students—attacked heavily "the neo-imperialism of the Soviet Union" and also refused to cooperate with the new communist party. It was certainly no accident that the faction of intellectuals who think more in terms of "cultural revolution" and verbal propaganda stood against the great majority of the left workers who reflect historical development in terms of socio-economic change and believe more in strong organization and practical political work as against theoretical concepts. Considering the above formulated experiences of the German Left, it seems to be important that this second group will carry through its concept against an intellectual-elitist "left radicalism" as well as against "social-democratic opportunism". But the dedicated West German democrats have to examine in every single case if judgements like "left radicalism" and "social-democratic opportunism" are not used as mere formulas of denunciation of progressive groups and concepts. This dialectic relationship will mark the future development of the German Left: to emphasize the openness of the movement to all groups and individuals who are threatened by the irrationality and inhumanity of the present system; but to prevent the paralysis or the destruction of the movement on account of different ideas and priorities which reflect primarily the different social position of the various potential left groups.

PICKING BALLOONS, NOVEMBER 1968

by Peter J. O'Connell



CREATING A PUPPET SHOW

by Rosmarie Greiner

In September, a box full of hand-puppets visited the Children's School. The kids made big eyes as each puppet came out of the box, bowed and told his name. The girls loved the princesses and fairies, the boys the lion and robber, and the black children wanted to keep an African tribesman. Fingers tried to fit into the holes of the figures, the puppets became alive, they talked, flew around the room and the magician already did tricks while the robber beat up Kasper. Then questions arose: "How did you make the faces? What are those curls made of? Is that real fur on the lion? Can I make one too?" Well, the interest was there and the following week we started creating our own puppets. That meant asking mother for a mixing bowl, shredding rolls of toilet paper, and mixing it with home-made paste. Some children kneeded the mush with real pleasure, others just put their one pointer finger in it; they were afraid of the mess. Only when they saw that the teacher was full of sticky paper mache and still could wash it off were they more daring. Jay wanted to know if he could eat that paste, and when told that it was water and flour he licked his fingers and nodded with satisfaction.

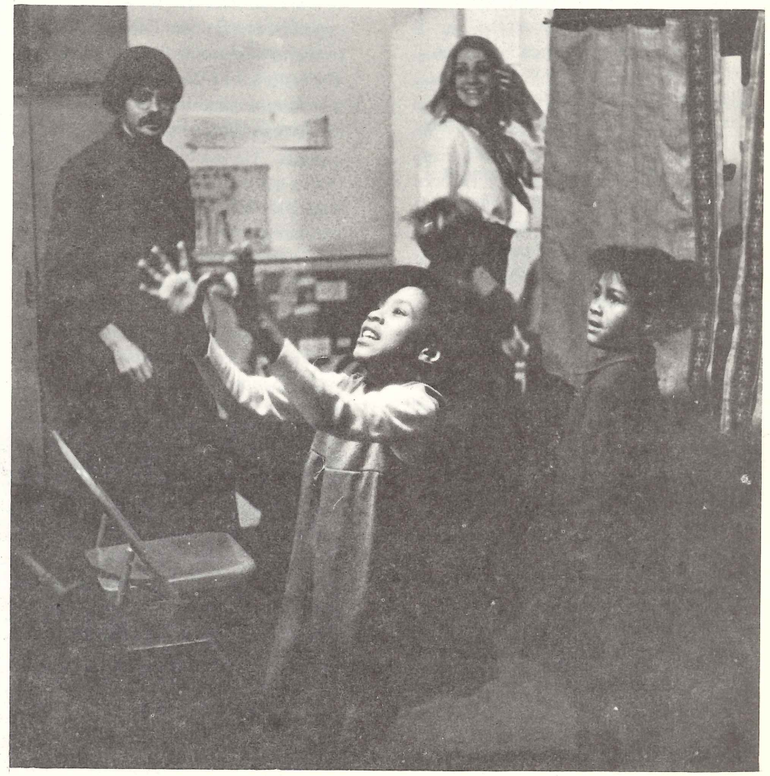
Next we rolled cardboard around the children's middle fingers in order to make the neck of the puppets. Then we crumpeled newspaper around and on top of the neck and pasted strips of newspaper around it. "It looks like an egg with bandaids," was one comment. Well, we let the "eggs" dry and then molded the face all around it. This was a difficult process. One had to remember to put on a chin, a mouth and the nose between the eyes. Some children already knew exactly what figure they were making and tried to mold an appropriate face. Smiling mouths, thin pointed ears, wicked eyes. Vanessa, on the other hand, just put some paper mache on, took some off, made eyes go inwards then popped out and finally she put a big snout and round ears on and called it a tiger. These wet, grey looking heads were put on a tray to dry and the children carried them faithfully into the yard on sunny days. Nevertheless, they moulded over the weekend. It was a sad night and some kids were ready to throw their puppet heads away. So we baked them in the oven and the result was dry, slightly burned heads. Again disappointment appeared, especially as some ears had fallen off. But the paint took care of everything. This painstaking problem was much fun. All colors are possible for puppets; so a pink witch appeared, a multi-colored polar bear, a green dragon and a white cat too. Three of the black children started thinking about white princesses and a white Kasper, but while painting they used only black. A special trick was fingernail polish, it produced shiny eyes and glossy skin. More and more ideas popped up. Grandmother got wine-glasses; the cat, broom-bristle whiskers; Julia, a fantastic black wool Afro; the polar bear, white fur on his ears; and the magician, a tall hat.

The next part was the clothing. The children learned amazingly fast to copy a pattern, pin it together and sew the sides with matching thread. Everybody looked at Anja with surprise, saying: "Wow, when I was five, I didn't know how to sew." Buttons were stitched on, lined cloaks were produced and gold bands and glittery sequins pasted on. Some children made felt hands. "It's like a mitten, when you're finished sewing you turn it inside out." Excitement grew and the first finished puppet was the bank robber. He looked great in his maroon-blue gown. Now, Bill Crawford came in to design a stage, and soon children were sawing, hammering and learning how to put screws in. There always was a fight for the electric drill, and victory was to be able to do more screws than anyone else.

Now the time was here to make plays; the children formed three groups spontaneously and started practicing. This was the hardest part; it meant talking loud, working in a group and presenting a story in understandable sequences. The contents were very similar: the bad guy does something to the good guy, but loses in the end. Within this framework the children created many situations around complex intrigues and workable solutions. Whenever practicing got too wild, some retired to cardboard and paint, preparing props. These were anything from a castle with an opening door to a bush which becomes a black cow. While doing all that, we discussed tickets and prices; everybody agreed that a quarter would be too much but that their mothers and friends would probably go for a dime. Also, it became clear that the show had to be at night in order for many people to come. Finally Mrs. Greenberg made lovely curtains, and I brought a bell. The last day before the show was spent practicing.

Then the big night arrived. About forty people waited for the curtain to open and, in fact, it really did open. (That was Bobby's and my job, and working, we were able to see how totally involved the children were behind stage. First, Margret the wicked witch caught Freddy the Tiger, with the help of a bad dwarf. Gulliver the bird rescued Freddy by pulling a false fire-alarm. Happy ending: "I'll make up to you, you're a good witch now," said Freddy and they all danced. Next were the bank robbers. This play had many short scenes, many changes of props, lots of action, but few words. The guys robbed a bank, drove away in a black car, went to a show within the show, and finally were caught by the police. It closed with the robbers in jail. One said, "Well, I'll find a way to get out of here." His companion shouted, "Yeah!"

The third and longest story was titled "Marriage of Life." It was a complicated love story and presented some difficulties since five children had to maneuver behind stage, some on chairs, some on pillows. Also, at the last minute Julia's bed collapsed and could not be used, while grandmother's spoon disappeared. But, the story rolled on. First, grandmother decided to make wine with some sour berries. She was mixing her brew in the kitchen when Julia told her, "I want to marry Kasper." "Don't bother me," said grandmother, "you are too young; you are insatiable." Sadly, Julia went to her bedroom and cried heartily. Then the dragon stuck his head through the window ordering Julia to marry him. When Julia refused she simply was pulled by her Afro through the window. Screams! Grandmother hurried to the scene, asked the audience about Julia, and called on Kasper to rescue her Julia. By this time crisis was here; the younger audience got excited; Benjy, one little boy, jumped up to hit the dragon while another boy behind stage broke into tears because he couldn't ring the bell. In fact, he was not even going to play his part as the polar bear. So when Kasper knocked on Polar bear's house, the dialogue went like this: "Polar bear, come out, the dragon took Julia." "So what" (an angry voice). "Come out and help me." "No I ain't." Whispering of another player to the little boy, "Come out, mother isn't going to think that it's a good show if you don't play." Kasper: "Polar bear, come on." "Okay" shouted the Polar bear while he came through his door. The two then went to the dragon, enticed him to marry Polar bear, and there we had a double marriage. Grandmother performed the ceremony, pronouncing Julia and Kasper "man and wife," and the ugly dragon and the fuzzy polar bear "dragon and Polar bear." The finale was singing and dancing of "Here comes the bride." Curtains, applause, hot relieved children, happy faces, and the decision that the income of $4.10 would be spent on going skating.



You may have noticed that the Newsletter has a new type style. This is because we are now using an IBM "Selectric-Composer."

ERRATUM
photos for GUILTY! in last issue by Ralph Ferrucci

Hill Arts Co-op: A Review

by Vivienne Brown

All over America and Europe, taking in Marcuse and AIM, radicals are turning on to culture as one vehicle of political change. People are wondering whether "alternative institutions" can play an important role both for propaganda, and to consolidate the "freedom areas" won by the Movement. In a different political context, it is interesting to look at the growth of one "alternative institution" in the Black community in the Hill.

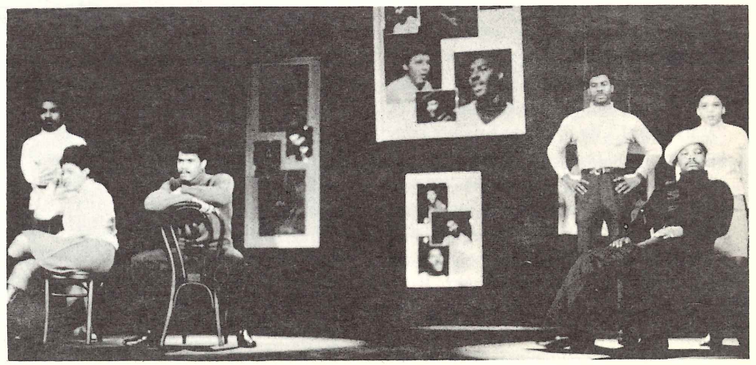
The Hill Arts Co-op's latest production is called **The Now Blacks**, and has been playing for three weeks at the converted warehouse on South Portsea Street, the base of the Co-op since it started in the summer of 1967.

The Now Blacks is a sequence of sketches and songs evoking the resilience and strength of Black people and Black culture. Topics range from slavery and lynching to the social and physical violence by which White society continues to repress Black men today. The refrain "And the strong get stronger and the strong men keep a' comin' on" clues us in to the political tide which cannot be stemmed. Later, a sketch calling for Black men to use stronger methods than civil disobedience is performed to the silvery backing of "We Shall Overcome." Although the material is not unusual, it is varied and interesting. It is mostly taken from the Princely Players, the group of Nashville high-school students which German Wilson created and accompanied on their visit to New Haven for the Black Arts Festival at Woolsey Hall this summer. He has since become Co-op director and is one of the six actors in this production.

The whole production is a double confrontation with the audience, heralded by the opening tableau of the cast frozen in uncomprosmising thought-power poses which speak to Black men of the pride and strength they can realize in themselves, and simultaniously speak to White spectators of the force which is inherently beyond White comprehension: the force of Black power. The theatre is so small that each spectator is confronted as one-to-one by the glaring actor. Whites were not, as they might have expected, fringe observers, but a majority of the audience, for whom a role and language were woven throughout the production (the second part, especially, had important sections directed towards Whites).

If the composition of the audience, being mainly white and radical, did not ideally fit the temper of the material, the six on stage (four men and two women) carried the performance with strength and dignity. While this presentation (I'm avoiding the word "play") didn't call for the easy warmth that made **Day of Absence** really enjoyable, the cast seems to have gained more skill and control, as well as more cohesion as a group. Their strength seems to have come from working with professionals at Long Wharf Theatre this summer, and from the arrival of German Wilson, the new Black director. He is a talented director, with a good eye for movement and stage plotting that heightens the dramatic impact of the work. The only music accompaniment to songs and speech was the stark line of one tom-tom. Diane Shaw, who was on stage for the first time in her life, has a very beautiful voice, and gave a moving performance of a long, low, sad song about her Black baby. The whole performance was notable for its combination of intensity, passion, and control. Both Diane Shaw and Kelly Graham said they couldn't call their parts "acting", "...because it's something that's in us and it's just coming out," Diane said.

The cohesion of the group, and their growing stature as actors, could not have been predicted from the shaky start of the Co-op in summer 1967, when three White Yale drama students got work-study grants for the summer. I found out about its beginnings from Art Ginsberg, one of the three, who was director until September 1968. He admitted that their approach had been in the typical helping-hand liberal tradition. They had no connections and no support in the community, and CPI and Redevelopment officials were hanging around, without giving much help, just in case something did come of it. In October, they got a $10,000 grant from the New Haven Foundation, to fund a program of theatre, movie-making, trips and social facilities. In March, 1968, they gave their first production, **Dutchman**, by Leroi Jones, starring Bobby Blount from the Hill; this was his first appearance on stage. In June, using a full cast of neighborhood people in white masks, the Co-op presented **Day of Absence**, a play about what happened to the White people when all "their" Black men left town.



In the interview that follows, German Wilson describes his plans for expanding theatre at the Co-op. Art Ginsberg, still working for the Co-op, is more interested in films now, and hopes to be realizing a film and television program, bringing in a professional Black film-maker, and training six neighborhood people. Both Ginsberg and Wilson conceive of the theatre mainly in terms of its cultural value, as opposed to political agitation. Wilson wants to make it into a small, well-known professional theatre, and emphasizes the value of Black Theatre in developing Black Consciousness: "The Black Theatre is primarily a theatre of spirit, confronting the Black man in his interaction with his Brothers and with the White society...It can help disavow the stereotypes and replace them with meaningful images that represent us as we really are." Art Ginsberg, in a more informal context, said that he liked applying arts to the community, and making groovey things happen. Asked whether he would work in a White community in New Haven, he said he thought Whites didn't need it, and had less to communicate.

German Wilson faces the major problem of developing closer ties between the Co-op and the community. One of his plans is to work with young people, which he has already done successfully in Nashville and at the Yale Summer High School. He is confident that having a Black director will make the Black community take greater interest in the Co-op.

Perhaps the theatre, either Black or White, will never make itself relevant for ordinary people. The Co-op is the people's theatre in that it is training people of the streets, but the problem is also to find material that will involve the community. Both **Day of Absence** and **The Now Blacks** seem good material for community theatre, but the audience attendance shows that the community has not identified with this idea of cultural regeneration. Leroi Jones became an artist and then went back into his community. If the Co-op succeeds in doing that also, besides training articulate, intelligent Black actors, it may well become politically relevant not only in content, but also in function. I disagree with Art Ginsberg: I think that White neighborhoods have a great need for this kind of experience, and one of the problems of White American life is that the people are much further from developing a community culture than are people in the Hill.

BLACK ACTOR SPEAKS: KELLY GRAHAM

Q. How about starting with the present production, **The Now Blacks**, which is your first production since you came back to the Hill.

K. **The Now Blacks** is not really a play, because it doesn't have a plot. It's telling the Whites and the Blacks something: it's saying that we're no longer going to accept being oppressed, and we're going to do our thing. We're also telling the Blacks that don't know how it was before, we're putting details in for them. We're mostly doing our own thing, and when we get on the stage, it's not really, acting, it's that we feel what we're saying. We know what we're saying is the truth, and you couldn't really be classified as actors doing that. You could say that we're actors, but I don't feel like an actor when I'm doing my thing.

Q. Something that struck me when I saw the performance, was the dignity of the people on the stage. That fits in with the feeling you're describing. I was also interested by the large proportion of the play that is directed at White people—

K. Towards Whites and Blacks, but it is mostly directed at the Whites, but it was directed at Blacks because there is a lot of history that they are not taught in school, and a lot of people don't read enough about Black people, so they don't know it, so if they come to the Co-op, they can get a much better outlook on what's happening, and on what has happened.

Q. For the first time now, you have a Black director. Will this involve noticeable changes?

K. No, not really, because our former director, Arthur Ginsberg, he's very good, and he's still working with us, indirectly. We're going to be much more productive than before, because we know now we've got to get the theatre off the ground.

Q. Do you go into the streets to find people?

K. Yes, we have try-outs for each thing we do, we send out posters, or flyers. We ask all individuals out in the streets—Black kids—to come in and try for our thing. We don't have any professionals here: the only professional is German. We have a paid staff of four.

Q. When I talked of going into the streets just now, I was thinking also of taking your productions into pool-halls, into schools, into parks.

K. We haven't gone that deep into it as of yet. We've put on benefits, and we do little matinees and stuff for kids that don't have the money, and we do it for those that we think should get the message, because the high-school kids today aren't getting it like they're supposed to be getting it so far as the Black History bit is concerned. So we put it on for them. But so far as putting it on corners, and out in the streets I don't know; we haven't gone that deep into that.

Q. Recently, you did a production at Hillhouse high school. How did the kids react?

K. They dug it: it was a brand new thing for them, because they don't have the opportunity to get into that kind of stuff too often. They don't show it over at the schools. Maybe a Black history teacher, or a White history teacher, if he wants to show the kids another view than the White view, he can come over here, and we would go into our thing. It's still an education.

Q. Most of the history that is taught in school isn't the real history of the

White people either, which is something that has interested me about the production I've seen here: it seems to me that Whites and Blacks share one element at least in their relation to the system, and that is economic repression. Do you agree with this?
K. That there are some Whites who sympathize with the Black movement? I am aware of that to a certain degree, yes.

Q. No, I mean there are White people in the Hill who need to fight the system in the same way that the Black people are fighting it.
K. Well, that's the thing: the Black man is being degraded by the poor White, and the one up there, the middle class and the rich White man. All Whites come down on the Black man. There are some Whites who don't have as much, or even less than we do. But it's still that thing. This man is a beast, and he feels that we are sub-human, and he is our superior. It's a psychological problem. That's our main goal now, is to form our Black Theatre—I don't know about the Black Arts across town—to get the word out to the Black man, other than the theatre, let him know more about himself, let him know that he can be proud of himself. Because he's as good as anybody, or better.

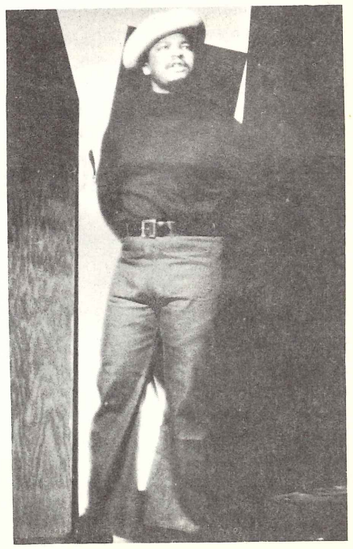
Here, Diane Shaw, one of the two actresses, joined in the conversation.

Diane Shaw: In most of the earlier years, you would see a Negro actor performing self-degrading parts in a play, which had a great psychological effect on the Black man. Let's face it, when you would go to a movie, or sit down and watch the TV in the afternoon, if you saw a Black cat, let's face it, what was he? An Uncle Tom, a butler, or a maid. We're trying to show them that they don't have to go through that bag any more.
K. That's today too. The average cat that you see on TV now, man or woman, they get up and do those shitty-assed commercials, and the parts they play on TV, they're not really being Black. I don't know if you've seen this Mod Squad bit. That's perverse, because this cat's not being Black. He is an Uncle Tom, because he's going into the Black neighborhood, he's ratting to the police on his brothers. And you gotta think, why is this man using dope, why is he stealing, why is he doing anything that he's doing? It's because the White man got him jammed up in that ghetto, and he can't do anything meaningful, so he just finds the best way out that he can, and maybe dope is a way out for him. And if he's a professional rogue, he's not stealing too tough from that white man, because all he does is go downtown and steal a suit or two. They catch up with him and send him to jail. What he's really doing, he's stealing mostly from his own people, because the man keeps him from downtown, he keeps him right there in that ghetto, in that rat-hole. They won't let you out of the ghetto, so you just stay right in here, and we're infested with crime, because we've got no way of doing any better, we don't know anything else to do. He won't give us the proper education. He says get up and pull yourself up by the boot-straps, and get you a job. But how the hell are you going to get you a job? Are you going to get you a job as a laborer? That's all a man could be: you're doing menial work.

Q. Unfortunately, one of the few ways up at the moment, if you take the Hill, is to work for CPI.
K. That's right, and you do it the way they want it done. What the system is doing, it's only paying the Black man not to riot. That's what all this shit is, grants and stuff; it's only paying us not to riot. Where it's not a riot, it's a revolution, but they call it riot. And the play brings out a lot of that stuff. For instance, where I say during the riot bit, "We don't kill; they kill." The majority of people that are killed in each riot is Black. There aren't that many Whites that are killed, and the Whites that are killed are shot by cops, shooting at Blacks, but they shoot the Whites by accident, but they write it up and say that a sniper did it.

Q. In the Hill, do you work closely with other organizations?
K. Yes, we work with the HPA; we work with the Hill Pax; we work with HAG—I don't know whether HAG is still in business now. But we did some stuff with Redevelopment, and with CPI, because we need all these organizations in order for our thing to function. We're not controlled by any of these people. Like, we're not controlled by HPA—I'm an HPA member. and so is Bob Blount, and so is Gregory, and so is Diane. But this particular organization is not controlled by that. Our thing is entirely different from the HPA. For one thing, the HPA is a very militant organization, and that has nothing to do with the theatre. We don't get on stage and tell the mayor that he should give us a million dollars; we just get on the stage and just perform. I don't know how people take it after we perform, but that's what we do. We're not another militant organization; it's just a theatre. We do want to pass the word on to the Black people, to let them know that we don't have to accept the present way we're being handled. We do that.

Q. What were you doing before you started acting?
K. I was working with Model Cities, under the Hill steering committee. We were trying to get more people involved in the Model Cities program that was coming into New Haven. Letting neighborhood people know that the money that was coming into the neighborhood was their money, it wouldn't be controlled by the Board of Alderman, or Mayor Lee, or any of the downtown city officials. That



if the people wanted it that way, the money would be in their control, and that they could do their own thing. That's how you got your Model Cities Agency started. And from that I came into this.

Q. Had you done any acting before?
K. No.

Q. Do you intend to go on acting?
K. Yes. I had the opportunity to go to New York about 6 weeks ago, and join a troupe there. We would be doing a lot of street theatre. I reneged on that because I want to stay here, and I want to work with the Co-op, and form our theatre here, and by doing this I would broaden my experience. I would know more when I do decide to go out—really out, not just here. What I really want to do: I want to be able to teach more people some of what I know, the little that I do know; I want to be able to let other Black cats and chicks see me, and say, well, if Kelly can do it, I can do it, because they can. I'm not the only one out there that can do some acting—there are others. And it's happening, because there's lots of cats now, they're asking if they can come into the theatre.

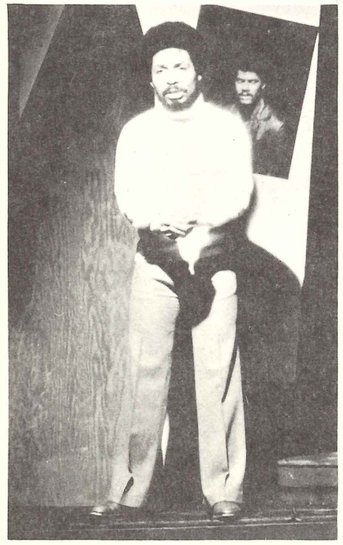
Q. That's interesting, because part of the "cultural deprivation" in the ghettos has meant that there have not been theatres for the people to go to, and theatre isn't a traditional kind of entertainment for Black people. I was wondering whether that was one of the problems for the Co-op.
K. It's a small problem. The reason they don't come is because they don't know what theatre really is, because I didn't know either—I wasn't coming to plays either before I got into this. It's only a problem of making them aware of what it is. The ones that had come to our previous performances, they come now to every one, and they dig it. I have a number of friends that came to see that first play I was in, me, Bobby and Greg, and they came to see each one out at Long Wharf.

Q. I saw **The Fire Bugs** out at Long Wharf. You were playing against David Clennon, a professional actor. There was an interesting contrast of your natural talent against his controlled style. Did you learn much from Long Wharf?
K. Yes, I learned much more than I did know before I went there. I learned a lot from Dave, because Dave and I did some other stuff than the **Fire-Bugs.** We did Becket's thing, **Endgame,** so we worked very closely. We were together practically all the time during rehearsals; and after rehearsals, we'd go out and have drinks, and just think about things, and see if we could (long pause) identify more with each other, as being Black and White, because we were doing Ham and Clove, and it's a very difficult play, and it's a thing where we had to be mostly the same race; we had to form a thing where we were neither Black nor White; we were just two; you couldn't say he was Black and that I'm White (laughing)...or, him White, and me Black, some difference, you know. So we just tried to make it two neutral people, just Ham and Clove, not Black and White, and we damn near succeeded in doing this, and I learned a lot from that.

Q. The Long Wharf Theatre is a long way outside the Hill. What was the purpose of moving out there?
K. It was to prove that Whites and Blacks can work together. And to prove that a Black cat out on the street can go into the theatre without going to college, or going to the Drama School.

BLACK DIRECTOR SPEAKS: GERMAN WILSON

Q. Did you come to New Haven because the Hill Arts Co-op was very exceptional?



G. Well, I don't know if you can say exceptional, but it was very exciting. It was the thing I had always wanted to do: I wanted to work in a Black theatre. It wasn't a Black theatre then, but it is now, and we are working toward that aim. This was a chance that I had been waiting for, so I took it.

Q. You travelled around the country a lot when you were with Princely Players. Did you see much other Black theatre?
G. Well, we saw some, but not a lot. Most of the Black Theatre is on the West Coast and the East Coast.

Q. Where is Black Theatre at in those places that you saw, and how does it compare with the Co-op?
G. Well, Black Theatre is the theatre of the people, the expression of the people, and what they're trying to do. They are theatres where they are trying to help Black people understand their culture and heritage, that's all.

Q. Do you feel that you are doing pioneering work, because not very much has been done so far? Or do you follow a model?
G. The whole thing is that the Black man has not been able to totally be part of the "Theatre," so Black people are going about their business to make a theatre of their own. A theatre that will express the qualities of their life as they are. And, in fact, trying to create an aesthetic form that is totally and completely Black. So, by that it's new, then I guess that, yeh, I am pioneering in that area. Like many of the other young Blacks who are working in the theatre across the country, the Lafayette Theatre, the Repertory theatre of New York, the Free Southern Theatre, a lot of the theatres that are coming up in Brooklyn, the Bronx, Manhattan, California, various theatres, doing different types of things, but they are basically rooted in trying to identify with Black culture and Black heritage.

Q. What are your plans: how do you hope to develop the theatre here?

G. Well, I hope that some day the Hill Co-op will be a fine repertory theatre which will maintain its roots with the community and the people in the community, and will not become a theatre like The Repertory Theatre in New York, where you end up having to pay $4-$5 for a ticket. I would always want to see this a place where you pay a dollar, so that the people off the streets can afford to come in, and enjoy what they are doing. In fact, I hope this theatre will train people off the street to become actors and actresses—not only just that, but learn something about the theatre, and receive meaningful employment and also have a creative experience in whatever we are doing in the theatre. So this is what I am driving for: I'm driving to make the Hill Arts Theatre a known name in the Black Theatre circle.

Q. Besides teaching people off the streets about the theatre, do you think you can teach them about their own community? Do you think you can be a channel of information?

G. I think the theatre is an excellent vehicle for that. I think the Black Theatre at the time is a social and political vehicle. And so therefore it will strengthen them in their understanding of their problems in the community and also their social life.

Q. What aspects of the life of the Black people in the Hill would you pick on for discussing in the theatre?

G. There is no particular aspect that I am interested in. I am interested in all aspects, because all those things that make up Black people I am interested in. I don't see any point in ignoring any of it. So when we handle different plays, we will be dealing with different attitudes, different emotions that are from Black people. What we intend to do is to express Black people as they are, and not try to change them, not try to stereotype them, present them as they are and let them realize they are as they are, and they are beautiful as they are, and there is no need to change.

Q. In the present production, **The Now Blacks**, you speak part of the time to White people. Do you regard it as part of the work you should do to speak to the White people, and especially the White people in the Hill? Or to White people in general?

G. No, to White people in general. I feel that is part of the theatre's job also, because also in helping the Black, it is also realized that in doing that it is hoped that that will also help the White. I mean, once Blacks can see their problems, and their inner situations, then they are more able to cope with the other problems that surround them, then Whites can see more clearly what the Blacks are trying to do, so that the theatre can say quite plainly, quite dramatically: "These are the things that are happening, these are the things that have happened, and this is where you are; what have you done? What are you doing?" Then this I think can help people see more vividly what the problem is and then do something about it. So I speak to Whites too, but mainly to Blacks.

Q. In answer to one of my questions earlier, you said that you thought theatre was a very good vehicle of communicating information. You answered the question with reference to Black consciousness, but is there information about the Hill neighborhood that could be brought into the theatre?

G. Yes, there is, but I don't think that right now I can give you any specifics; but there are problems that will arise, there are things that if a problem arises, we can dramatize that situation, and present a viewpoint, then there can be a discussion by the people in the community as to where they stand on this particular situation. For instance, I think that one of the strong things across the country that needs to be dramatized more and more is police brutality, and I think that could be dramatized in plays; then there could be discussions afterwards, you can bring in people to speak about this, and things like that.

Q. How will you expand in the next year?

G. I hope we will have a large group: eight or nine or ten regular actors. The same thing with the young people: we will do at least four productions a year, possibly with the young people travelling in the immediate vicinity in the State of Connecticut.

Staff
Ann Austin
John Bancroft
Vivienne Brown
Dave Dickson
Joelle Dominski
Carol Forsythe
Sasha Harmon
Peggy Howard
Pat Lynch
Alice Mick
Peter O'Connell
Liz Rose
Peter Rose
Stephanie Weissman
Staff of
The Advocate Press

The bulletin of the American Independent Movement is published every two weeks. Letters to the editor are welcome. Subscriptions to the AIM Newsletter cost $5 a year, $10 for a sponsoring subscription. Make checks payable to AIM Newsletter and send to AIM
241 Orange Street
New Haven, Conn. 06510
For information, write or call 787-0123.

AMERICAN INDEPENDENT MOVEMENT
241 Orange Street
New Haven, Connecticut 06510

Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage
PAID
3.6c
New Haven, Conn.
Permit No. 89